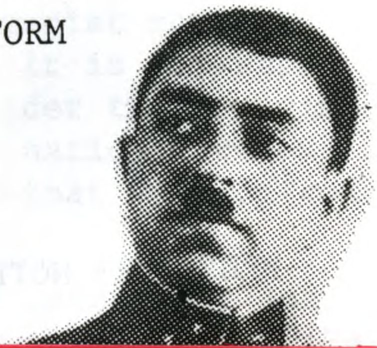
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AMANULLAH: THE HARD CASE OF REFORM IN AFGHANISTAN

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PREFATORY NOTE

This is not intended to be a scholarly analysis. Quotes, for instance, have sometimes been telescoped without ellipses for easier reading. The essay depends throughout on secondary materials and is not meant to be complete, It is meant as suggestive, comparative, prolegomenous, a writing offered to a circle of friends of Afghanistan.

Paul Overby
Portland, Oregon
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AMANULLAH: THE HARD CASE OF REFORM IN AFGHANISTAN

For the past 15 years the nation of Afghanistan has been torn limb from limb in a war that was waged for reasons that we are still trying to comprehend. We do know that the outright deaths alone, not counting injuries, may amount to a stunning one-tenth of the population: in the US that would be 25 million souls. To understand what the 1978 communist coup meant and to analyze the power struggle that continues in Kabul, it is desirable, perhaps necessary (though sadly, not sufficient), to consider the experiment of King Amanullah. He, too, became posessed by the idea of national renewal; posessed, we can speculate, in an almost physical way so that ideological concepts turned into gut needs.

The Afghan communists saw themselves as modern day Amanullahs, messengers of the future, revolutionary heroes: "We wanted to be like Lenin, Nasser, Castro and Mao," said one veteran of Saur. [1] They hung pictures of Amanullah from buildings in Kabul. The beliefs of the leaders in Kabul were an important part of the total reality of the war, and they sanctified Amanullah.

Several years ago in Peshawar, Rasul Amin of the Writers' Union of Free Afghanistan told me an odd story that his grandmother had told him. She had said that if you must sleep in a graveyard (strange condition!), never sleep between the graves, but closer to one or the other. That way you will have an ally when the devil comes. In other words, don't get caught in the middle. It was on such a bitter patch of ground - between two realities - that the early modernizer could be found, on the border between tradition and modernity; Amanullah slept between the graves.

The late Burhanuddin Majrooh described the situation of those who went to schools dedicated to the Western method. "An individual who was educated in the new system became a strange animal, neither a complete Westerner nor a genuine Easterner," Majrooh wrote. "He became a stranger: stranger to his own society and still worse, a stranger to himself." [2] Of all those living contradictions in Afghanistan, those by now familiar figures, the marginal men of the Third World, King Amanullah remains the most famous single example: a man caught in the straddle between a stubborn traditional society and unconfined dreams of a new dispensation.

Amanullah (1892-1960) was the grandson of the redoubtable Amir Abdur Rahman, founder of the modern Afghan state. He seized the throne in 1919 when his father was mysteriously assassinated and ruled until he was exiled to Europe in 1929, a period of almost exactly 10 years. During his reign Amanullah made one of the more amazing attempts to modernize an Islamic state; with a conscious image of Kemalist Turkey, the young amir/king proposed to operate in one of the least developed areas in Asia. Half a century later his reign was (in turn) taken as a model by the revolutionary Marxists. If modernization has been the main fault line of political conflict in Afghanistan during this century, Amanullah was the first to meet the problem head on - and, also, the first to be destroyed by it. [3]

As lookouts on the watchtowers of modernism, Amanullah and his modernist collaborators must have felt the disbelief or indifference of their compatriots to be all the more frustrating since the New Thing, to them, was so persuasively complete. The life in the industrialized nations in Europe and America offered a constellation of advantages and temptations that spanned human experience: power, dignity, safety, comfort, intellectual stimulation, sensual pleasure. Every trait of character was appealed to - heart, mind, crass appetite. Everything was promised, all material needs were to be provided for. And if the Afghans could achieve this, there was a bonus - they would be equal again. The spell of the modern was a virtual intoxication at times. When the Indian holy man Vivekananda arrived in the US in 1893, he wandered, in the words of Romain Rolland, "like a great child, gazing, mouth agape. Everything was new to him and both surprised and stupefied him. He had never imagined the power, the riches, the inventive genius of this Western world... he succumbed to its exciting intoxication, and his first feeling was of juvenile acceptance; his admiration knew no bounds." [4]

The fact that Vivekananda's later judgement was harshly critical of the West is also significant because it was a necessary corrective; he completed a characteristic cycle of support and rejection. The initial admiration dissolved when the receivers of the modern culture (like the highly educated members of the Indian civil service in the colonial period) realized they were not to be afforded equal status in the new order.

When this intoxication combined with another emotion, a powerful desire to grasp European-type power in order to right legitimate wrongs suffered at the hands of the West, an almost irresistable current was produced that pushed the Asian modernizers forward.

Amanullah was a sensitive membrane that vibrated in response to the energies of the supercharged decade of the 1920s. He was an enthusiast, an eager promoter of the modern, an ardent believer in a re-formed, powerful Afghanistan during a period when a kind of modern, raw ardor became fashionable. His models were Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, Reza Shah in Persia and even Josef Stalin. In fact, it was Stalin who laid out the rationale for modernization with crystal lucidity: "Old Russia...was ceaselessly beaten for her backwardness... For her military backwardness. For cultural backwardness. For political backwardness... She was beaten because to beat her was profitable and went unpunished." [5]

Amanullah was born in 1892, the son of Amir Habibullah. His mother was the Ulya Hazrat, the "first queen" of Habibullah and, by all accounts, a formidable woman. She came from the important Loynab family of the powerful Barakzai clan of the Mohammadzai tribe of the Durrani Pashtuns who had dominated Afghanistan for 175 years. "In her mind there was no question that her only son, Amanullah, was entitled to succeed to the throne." [6] Actually there was plenty of competition - Habibullah had 58 children - but those with a real chance narrowed down to two sons older than Amanullah: Inayatullah and Hayatullah. Each of these had a drawback. Inayatullah's mother was non-Pashtun and Hayatullah's mother was a <u>surati</u>, not exactly a concubine, but not "royal" either. There was another son whose mother was also a "royal queen," but he was younger. Then there was Amanullah's uncle, Nasrullah, Habibullah's younger brother.

"In any case, the Ulya Hazrat set out to exert all her considerable skill, intelligence, and influence to prepare Amanullah for the throne." Poullada, one of the best sources on Amanullah in <u>Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan</u>, has her

putting him "through a rigorous course of training in the arts of political intrigue and government." [7] Whether or not it was ever so structured, she was a powerful influence on Amanullah. Ulya Hazrat and her family were very anti-English so Amanullah probably learned his Brito-phobia at his mother's knee. Rhea Talley Stewart in Fire in Afghanistan says he was afraid of her.

It is not difficult to discover Freudian reasons for the fact that Amanullah acquired a powerful teacher and guide from the time he reached the age of reason. Mahmud Beg Tarzi was one of his father's advisers, a fascinating talker in several languages, a masterful writer, in short, the most brilliant and effective of those who had been converted to modernism. Tarzi's father had been kicked out of Afghanistan by Abdur Rahman and found refuge in the Ottoman Empire, so it was in Damascus, then controlled by Turkey, that Mahmud Tarzi was first exposed to European modernism. He worked as an Ottoman bureaucrat before the turn of the century. In 1902, at the age of 36, with both his father and Abdur Rahman dead, Tarzi finally was able to return to Afghanistan.

He became a tireless advocate of modernism and apparently something of a favorite of Amir Habibullah. In 1911 he was able to start the first newspaper, Seraj ul-akhbar-e-afghaniyah (Torch of Afghan News). It was published every two weeks under the sponsorship of the Amir. According to former foreign minister Abdul Samad Ghaus, who would have heard it as a matter of living memory, Seraj "had a profound impact on the intelligentsia." [8] Tarzi made the paper into a megaphone to propagate "his two great themes: 'Muslims must modernize or perish' and 'Colonialism and imperialism must go.'" [9] His bitter opposition to colonialism, British in particular, became a leitmotif of Afghan reform politics. In this light, the Marxist overtones in Amanullah's later social critique are less surprising.

Gregorian says Mahmud Tarzi was probably the first man in Afghanistan to understand that European power was not just based on military force, but really grew out of "Western cultural, economic, and industrial achievements." [10] In this he resembles another early modernizer, Kang Yuwei in China, exactly contemporaneous with Tarzi, who continually emphasized that industrialization was the key, more important than mere theory or the "moral" aspect. [11]

Unfortunately this major step toward modernization brought with it a major difficulty: the new culture was closely bound up with the place that had invented it, which was Europe. Neither Tarzi nor Kang could accept the logic that because the method was European, the master must be also. The argument in such situations is always that the tools of modern culture are not the same as the culture. The modernizing country need not become a carbon copy of the place from which modernity has come. Kang was confident that Chinese "moral" development was superior. [12] This is the more ideological component of the psychological progression from admiration to rejection.

This question of whether local spirit can be combined with modern, i.e., Western, technology to rebuild the nation without losing its soul goes to the bone of the conflict between Amanullah and the traditional mullahs and tribesmen in Afghanistan. Like Tarzi, Kang, Yoshida in Japan and Nehru in India, Amanullah believed that a new man could be made from pieces of East and West.

A sketch of young Amanullah: as a boy fond of outdoor sports, especially hunting; voracious reader; grew up in and around the palace; attended the military school that Habibullah had set up for young Afghan aristocrats; showed alert intelligence and an inquiring mind, especially about the outside world. "At the early age of 15 he confided to one of his aides that he was deeply ashamed of the backwardness of his country and manifested great frustration that Afghanistan had been denied the greatness it deserved." He supposedly ascribed this to the "ignorance of the people and the deliberate imperialist policies of Britain." [13]

Amanullah became an avid reader of Tarzi's Seraj, which first appeared when he was 19. A group formed around the middle-aged arch-reformer, his newspaper and young Amanullah. Not really a political party, this collection of like-minded young men from the upper classes adopted the name of "Young Afghans" after the famous reform gang in Turkey. Admiration for the Turks is a continuing theme at a time when the idea of Asia vs. Europe had been given a tremendous boost by the Japanese defeat of Russia in the war of 1904-5. During WW I the Ottomans lined up against the major colonial powers - Britain and France. Then from 1918 to 1923 a new Turkey continued its struggle against Europe in the defense of its Anatolian heartland. Finally, under the dictatorship of Kemal Ataturk, the Young Turk domestic program was realized with a vengeance, and Turkey achieved at least rapid superficial modernization. There was also a religious explanation behind the Turkish connection: the identification of the Turkish sultan as caliph, religious leader of all Islam, a title that went back to the four major leaders who succeeded the Prophet Mohammad in the middle of the 7th century, the golden age of Islam.

The message of Tarzi's Seraj was that Afghanistan, and most of the Muslim world, due to ignorance of modern institutions and science, was in the grip of a tragic decline. As we have seen, modernity need not be finally identified with the West in this view: "It belonged to all humanity for the taking." [14] Ignorance created disunity among Muslims. To "love one's country was to love one's religion and vice versa." [15] This dynamic linking of Islam, modernization and nationalism was quoted among reformist circles outside Afghanistan with approval - though at home its influence was (according to Poullada) limited to the intelligentsia and ruling class.

Tarzi was determined to start building a bridge to the outside world. His newspaper was one step. Habibiya College - really a high school - founded in 1904 - was another. The curriculum at Habibiya was patterned on European models and the modern school quickly became the school of the elite. The same was true in China where Yenjing, later Bejing University, a school with a Western curriculum, was number one, and India, with the British-style Presidency College in Madras. When the most prestigious school is also the most Western one, the traditional society has been seriously weakened.

At every step, Tarzi and Amanullah had to face the nagging question of whether it was possible to take Western cultural, economic and industrial achievements and avoid the Western imperialism that they so much feared. Could the tools really be taken out of their kit? If a modernizing country ends up accepting the entire cultural package that comes with electricity, railroads, etc., it gains the matchless power of rationalistic science-technology, but loses that peculiar, chthonic form that was its traditional culture. It loses an important piece of its soul. Even though formal control in a political sense (i.e., having the foreigners in the capital actually running things) may be absent, another form of imperialism is very much there.

For the effects go beyond VCRs and air conditioning. Elie Kedourie says of traditional domination that it "brought opression and devastation to India," but the essentials of Indian life were left untouched. This old form of colonial domination, like the Moghuls, did not invade the essence. [16] European rule was different, colder, impersonal. Rabindranath Tagore said, "In the products of the handloom the magic of man's living fingers finds its expression, and it harmonizes with the music of life. But the power loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production."

Modernization is more than the quick adoption of a few techniques. The social roles of each person are expanded; the pace of life is quickened; relationships tend to become quantified on a money basis (as Marx pointed out); life becomes dominated, in a prosperous modern society, by <u>things</u>; the power of critical reasoning tends to undermine the transcendental claims of religion; exposure to the outside world through communications and travel changes one's view of one's own society; in fact, all social certainty is eroded as change becomes the pitiless rule.

The oceanic change is described by Bertrand Russell in a forgotten little book, <u>The Impact of Science on Society</u>: "There are direct intellectual effects: the dispelling of many traditional beliefs and the adoption of others suggested by the success of the scientific method. In the prescientific world, power was God's. There was not much that men could do even in the most favorable circumstances. If you wished to slip through life without disaster, you must be meek. In the scientific world, all this is different. It is not by prayer and humility that you cause things to go as you wish, but by acquiring a knowledge of scientific laws. We were told that faith could remove mountains, but no one believed it; we are now told that the atomic bomb can remove mountains and everyone believes it." [17]

It is probably necessary to stop for a moment and consider exactly what "modern" and "modernization" mean - something like the following: that utility is more important than the non-rational; that the individual rather than the group is the basic unit of society and politics; that local prejudices give way to larger viewpoints; that work is separated from family, residence and community in bureaucratic organizations; that the groups that people live and work in are based on choice, not birth; that age gives up some of its authority to youth and men some of theirs to women; that mastery rather than fatalism determines the attitude "toward the material and human environment." [18] The central issue here, it seems to me, is the transformation of society through science and its practical face, technology. Both depend on a systematic improvement of a body of knowledge and practice through experimentation. Since the beginning of human time we have tried to form accurate and dependable pictures of the world. The transforming fact about modern science is <u>how much better</u> reality (i.e., nature and the world of man-made objects) is comprehended.

As a determined admirer of modernization, Tarzi was faced with all the pain of the discontinuity between old and new. Foremost was the embarrassing problem of adopting modern forms vs. slipping under foreign control. His solution was essentially to will it to be gone. When he affirmed modernity, it meant both science and democracy. But his understanding of "democracy" was the independence of Afghanistan. It meant freedom from outside control. He accepted modern accomplishments and even elements of the culture in which it was embedded, but he also insisted on the inviolability of Afghanistan. There could be no democracy - rule of the Afghan people - until the stranglehold of the foreigners was broken.

Democracy is still interpreted this way in 1992; freedom from foreign control (something Americans take largely for granted) is an important element. Another form, a corollary, of this belief is that once the country is free from foreign control, democracy has already been achieved in an important sense. In this way of thinking an authoritarian regime can call itself democratic if it is independent and popular.

Like Kang Yuwei in China, Tarzi tried to justify his interest in the modern with references to the traditional. This was, of course, a common pattern. Even Abdur Rahman, who controlled the mullahs through subsidies and death sentences, gave their traditional form of Islam lip service. Amanullah would be very busy later on ginning up Koranic justifications for modernization.

It is interesting that while the Chinese reformer Kang referred most often to Confucius (Kung Futse or Master Kung) to justify the changes of modernization, Tarzi went back to the golden age of Islam. Both the Prophet Mohammed and Master Kung opened up new perspectives of belief through their thought, words and lives - their totality. But the basic directions of the two patterns of thought were dramatically different. Master Kung invoked the spirit of dead ancestors, but never explicitly resorted to the transcendental. "The Master never talked to spirits." [19] He talked about the beliefs that underlay his recommended courses of action in a fairly direct, matter of fact way. The Analects are didactic, aristocratic - and occasionally sharp. "Master Kung said of the head of the Chi Family who had eight teams of dancers performing in his courtyard: If this man can be endured, who cannot be endured!" [20]

The point is that the central concept of Confucian jen, "the good," is defined in this world, not the next. The message of the Koran is also quite down to earth, but it is anchored in Heaven. Mohammed is perfect among men: he is also special because he was blessed directly by God through Gabriel. The rules of God may make sense - but perhaps they won't. They may appear absurd; nonetheless, they must be obeyed - the rational basis need not be fretted over. Jen is difficult to express and Master Kung is always struggling with it. Allah, on the other hand, is impossible to describe - by definition. Although Islam in some ways seems the most practical of the religions, it is fundamentally different from Confucianism, the most spiritual of the ethical systems.

So Kang was referring back to a system with a different set of possibilities. The Confucian world was centered around human relations and implicitly ruled out the supernatural; while the structure Tarzi was trying to summon up was primarily a religious world that happened to be deeply connected to the everyday.

These considerations are perhaps not so abstract as they first appear: the fastest developing countries in the world are in East Asia, all within the "Confucian" sphere. Does the secularism of their tradition play a role? I think it does. Religion can become associated with custom over long periods of time and thus prevent change by covering mere usage with infallible revelation. Many Muslims admit this sanctification of the mundane has affected society, the rules of dress, for instance.

Even if Tarzi secretly doubted the divine origin of Islam, he could not admit it, not in a society that expected all plans to make at least formal obeisance to religious formulas. Anti-Islamic positions were unthinkable; Islamically neutral ones were unsafe. At least some of the reformers must have suffered qualms and doubts as deep-rooted beliefs collided with new ambitions.

Amanullah was married twice while still very young: at 16 to an unknown girl - that lasted only a few days; two years later to a wife who died in childbirth. Then, at the age of 21, he married the woman he loved, Soraya, the daughter of his teacher, Tarzi. Unlike his father, he was not unduly devoted to the harem.

The center of Amanullah's early activity seems to have been the Young Afghans. Obviously he was one of its leading members. The group met openly and most likely were gaining influence until the whole landscape was changed by the cataclysm of WW I. Politics suddenly grew more serious, and Habibullah was no longer able to indulge the angry anti-British rhetoric of Tarzi, the house intellectual, and his clutch of young hotspurs. The Afghan emirate had lived in uneasy partnership with the British Empire for a generation, and now that Empire was being pushed to the wall by the Germans; with its collective life at stake, anything was possible. Habibullah had to be careful. Certainly he cannot have appreciated the hostile criticism of his decision to remain neutral as cowardly, un-Afghan and unmanly. The Young Afghans had to move behind closed doors.

The ruling class was divided into two parties by the war: those in favor of going to war against Britain in alliance with Germany and Turkey, and those in favor of neutrality. The war party was much larger. The British were hated aggressors. And the Germans had managed to get an expedition across Persia to Kabul; they made the Afghans an offer that was reminiscent of the 1917 Zimmerman telegram to Mexico: throw in with us, attack our common enemy and you will regain your lost territories. For Mexico it had been the southwestern US; for Afghanistan, the Pashtun lands surrendered to the British when the Durand Line was drawn in 1893.

Habibullah signed a meaningless agreement with the Germans and stayed neutral. The fact that there was nothing to be gained from the Germans and neutrality was the smartest move made little impression on Habibullah's critics, including his son. After the armistice in Europe they started carping again, now saying that Habibullah wasn't getting enough from the British in return for Afghan neutrality, which the British, in fact, had actually recommended/demanded. The Young Afghans said the price should be full independence: an end to the control of foreign affairs by the British. But Habibullah, who always tended to be a bit vague, dawdled as much with independence as he had with his modernization projects. The young Afghans sneered. In the countryside he was seen as a kind of British lapdog.

So when Habibullah was assassinated in 1919, it was not entirely a surprise. He was not popular and he had never been as strong as old Abdur Rahman. Whoever killed him, and the culprit was never discovered (his sleeping quarters were well guarded and nothing was heard), the result was that Amanullah seized the throne. This took some effrontery since there were an uncle, Nasrullah, and two older brothers, Inayatullah and Hayatullah. And although primogeniture was not an inflexible rule among the Pashtuns, it was apparently considered the right thing to do in cases where there was no clear reason for ignoring it. [21] What's more, Nasrullah, the uncle, had actually been recognized as the new amir. But Amanullah made the right moves.

Habibullah had died on a winter trip to Jalalabad. Amanullah happened to be in Kabul. The treasury and the main armory were in the capital, so Amanullah had the hard coin to simply outbid (five rupees to three) his uncle in raising the pay of the army. Nasrullah went into prison and never reappeared; Inayatullah, a forceless personality, accepted the new dispensation, as did Hayatullah with somewhat less grace. [22]

Amanullah also had the support of the Young Afghans and especially Mahmud Tarzi. The old mentor had apparently chosen him as the one most likely to fulfill his great dream, the conversion of Afghanistan into a modern state.

Amanullah's first initiative was predictable and entirely in the spirit of Tarzi: freedom from British control of foreign affairs. Tarzi became foreign minister and they announced that Afghanistan intended to establish relations with other nations directly. The British tried to delay matters by referring to the period of mourning for Habibullah. Abdul Samad Ghaus, a former Afghan foreign minister, claims that when Amanullah realized the British were stalling, he "decided to use the one device the British feared most, the tribal uprising." This uprising was to take place on the border. Then he buttressed the effect of the uprising "with the dispatch of regular Afghan armies to the Indian border." [23]

Whatever the exact sequence of events, the British lost a skirmish or two, their war-weary troops actually refused to go to the front, and the Government of India faced the double danger of Pashtun tribal unrest on the frontier (the famous Khyber Rifles had to be disbanded) and nationalist agitation in the Indian heartland. Meanwhile, in Kabul, "Amanullah, disappointed with the performance of his armies on the eastern and southern fronts, did not want to expose them any longer to a militarily disadvantageous position. Moreover, tribal upheavals had a chemistry of their own. They could spring out of control and boomerang." [24] The British were using aerial bombardment for the first time, which must have been disconcerting. So after a "war" which lasted at most two or three months, both sides were ready for negotiations - which turned out to be even longer and more confusing.

The question in all this is why the Afghans thought they had to ask the British for their independence in the first place. There were no British troops on Afghan soil. British subsidies were valuable but not strictly necessary. It was as if their lack of independence was mostly in their own minds. Why couldn't they just send their representatives to different nations? Why did they need the approval of the British?

One answer might be the fact that the Afghans considered the British to be holding part of Afghanistan hostage - the lands which Abdur Rahman had dealt away in the 1890s in order to keep the rest of the country. From Chitral down through Baluchistan, many Pashtuns (and others) had fallen under British-Indian control. Amanullah wanted those territories back. He probably expected revolutionary pressures in India to strengthen his hand. If he was to be disappointed in this expectation, I think there was another social-psychological aspect to the apparent Afghan deference.

Elie Kedourie makes the controversial claim that "both Europeans and those whom they came to dominate had a firm and profound belief in the superiority of Western culture." [25] "And those they came to dominate"! In other words, the locals believed that the West was better. This statement is dynamite. Any real discussion of modernization is explosive when it makes judgments between national, ethnic or racial groups. Charges, from provincialism to racism are immediately set off, with good reason, of course. If there is anyone who still believes that the colonial venture was undertaken by the colonizers as an act of altruism toward the colonies, they only have to read a book like George Orwell's Burmese Days.

But as sensitive as the topic is, there is important matter here, and it must be approached. It seems to me that a feeling of deference (justified or not) sometimes exists in developing countries toward the developed world or its

representatives. I would speculate that the same feeling existed among the Afghans in 1919. Everyone - the British, the rest of the world - even the Afghans - believed that Afghanistan was in the British sphere of influence. After all, the British deserved to have that control, did they not? They had exercised control over Afghanistan's foreign affairs since the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879 and a written agreement with Abdur Rahman in 1880. The agreements had been carefully reaffirmed at various points.

Akbar S. Ahmed, the Pakistani Pashtun anthropologist, says that "colonial rule paralysed Muslim societies, congealed thought and froze their history. Muslims were finding it difficult to reconcile themselves with what was rapidly becoming the European phase of world history, and in their failure and anger they rejected the symbols of modernity." [26]

This paralysis - or whatever that negative impact is called - is, I believe, at the heart of the war in Afghanistan over modernization that began seriously with Amanullah and continues to the moment you read this. There is a battle going on all over the world between two cultures. On one side is the culture of scientific modernism and on the other, the traditional cultures of every country in the so-called Third World. Afghanistan is just one of these countries.

While negotiations with the British dragged on, a treaty with the Soviets was initialed by the Afghans in September 1920 and ratified by Amanullah in August 1921. The British were naturally alarmed; the Soviets had been given consulates in Ghazni and Kandahar on the south side of the Hindu Kush, close to India. The atmosphere became one in which both sides wanted to have an agreement with each other as a matter of balance, "The two sides, therefore, agreed to reach an agreement." [27] The Afghans didn't get the tribal areas in India but they did get "independence." The treaty was signed in November 1921. Of course, the Afghans were not going Communist despite Moscow's financial aid and two planes and technicians for the fledgling Afghan air force. To balance Soviet influence, Amanullah invited in Germans, Italians and, especially, Turks. If he had had any illusions, they were dispelled when the Bolsheviks absorbed, contrary to promises, the areas around Bokhara into the USSR.

Despite Amanullah's earnest disclaimers, the British remained suspicious of Moscow. Of course, they had harbored these feelings for many years. Even Elphinstone, the first English observer, writing around 1810, had noted that Afghans had always been supporters of Indian malcontents. [28] London's fear of the Russians had now become a fear of Bolshevik influence on Amanullah that could in turn stoke the independence agitation in India. The fear had some basis, since a Pashtun was one of the first graduates of the "University of the Toilers of the East" in Moscow, [29] and the charismatic Pashtun chief Ghaffar Khan was among Gandhi's most prominent followers.

At the same time, 1919, that "the atmosphere was charged with a surge for independence" the drive for modernization took hold. [30] That product of modernity, the nation-state, seemed like a prerequisite to achieve modernity. First Afghanistan would demand to be freed of any restrictions on its sovereignty imposed by the British Empire; then it would attempt to construct an indigenous version of the very system that characterized its former oppressor.

Amanullah is, of course, located at a certain point along the continuous development of the Afghan relation with modernity. It is worthwhile to try to make some sense of the unfolding of these relations.

Toward the beginning of contact between Afghanistan and Europe comes the intriguingly named Montstuart Elphinstone, to whom we are indebted for the admirably clear record of his embassy to the Afghans, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul. Charming and bright and apparently a comer in the British government of India, he was chosen in 1808 to head up a diplomatic expedition to the Afghans.

The motive behind the expedition was the fear that Napoleon had designs on India. London was aware of contacts that the French emperor had initiated with the Shah of Persia; his alliance with Russia after the Treaty of Tilsit theoretically (though fantastically) allowed him to consider a move into the subcontinent without worrying about his northern flank. Elphinstone was to establish contacts with the Afghans, gain their good will and spoil the chances of the French. Then, as now, Afghanistan was considered the gateway to the subcontinent.

Elphinstone started from Delhi in October 1808. His retinue eventually included 14 English officers, surveyors, diplomats and clerks, 400 local troops, 600 camels "besides twelve or thirteen elephants." They reached Peshawar, then the winter capital of the Afghan kingdom, in February 1809, where Elphinstone met Shah Shujah and many of the leading court figures. Some of these men at least had a genuine interest in new things; contact with Europe was, of course, not entirely unknown. A few - a very few - Europeans were living in Afghanistan - even in 1808-9. Limited trade connected the two places. When Elphinstone presented the Afghans with two mirrors he had laboriously transported from India, he discovered they already had several.

The Afghans "always showed a desire to be informed about the state of countries at a distance from their own," Elphinstone writes approvingly, "and some were very anxious to improve themselves by acquiring a knowledge of our sciences." He gave "a short account of the Copernican system to a Moollah," but then got stuck answering detailed questions in Persian. The interest in military matters is clear even at this early stage: "...While in Calcutta, I carried a great many Afghauns of all ranks, from Moollahs to grooms, to see the arsenal, to visit ships, and to some other sights which were new to them, and it was extremely pleasing to see the interest they took in everything, and the gratification they received. One of the Moollahs, however, was greatly disappointed in not finding the wheel used for boring cannon turned by steam, as he had read in the travels of Meerza Abo Taulib was the case in England."

Indeed, Elphinstone found the Afghans to have a livlier curiosity about new things than the Indians. "I have often seen natives of India at spectacles of the same nature [e.g., the arsenal], and though they were polite enough to express much admiration, they did it with a calmness that showed how little they were interested, while the questions they sometimes asked were of such a nature as to leave no doubt that their only object was to keep up conversation." [31]

However, not everyone was interested in Europe: "One leading khan, "to draw off the public attention from his own proceedings, affected great alarm from [sic] the English, and harangued against foreigners and their arts on all occasions." [32] Elphinstone's assessment of the Afghan habits of mind circa 1800 is interesting: "A learned man of those countries, meeting another with whom he is not acquainted, will ask him what sciences he studied (a question which would puzzle most well-informed Englishmen), and then ask what books he has read: to which the other will answer, 'up to so and so,' which will be at once understood, as they read all books in a fixed order like schoolboys.

"This practice prevents their having much of the miscellaneous knowledge of European gentlemen, though, on the other hand, they generally know what they have learned well. It seems likely to damp curiosity, and to check all excursions of the mind; and accordingly there is generally a want of ardour in pursuit of knowledge among the Asiatics, which is partaken by the Afghauns..." [33] He saw the tendency of rote learning as undermining the European notion of scientific investigation. Of course, it is also true that even with a cool-headed observer like Elphinstone, we have to pick our way among generalizations and prejudices of the time.

Their reactions - indifference, curiosity, rejection - probably describe the natural range of responses a traditional society was likely to have toward Europeans on first contact. Which one of these was to predominate probably depended on circumstances - and chance - but on the whole the response was negative; which is hardly surprising. The Afghans tended toward isolation. Although Dupree claims that Abdur Rahman is exceptional in his isolationism, it seems to me that Afghan willingness to look outward usually stopped at the city limits of the capital. [34] Weren't the feelings of, say, the Ghilzai's essentially inward turning? Their interest was directed toward the protection of their own territories, the independence of the various constituent tribes, clans and assorted sub-groups, and the assertion of these principles through warfare, which involved their overriding warrior code of honor. None of these sort out well with the flexibility required for entertaining new and strange ideas.

So it is hardly surprising that the initial reaction of the Afghans - in general - toward the appearance of Europeans would be suspicious, critical, reserved. They were willing to assume the burdens of ruling other peoples (as in numerous invasions of India) but they were impatient at being subjected to the same deal themselves. In this they resemble most other nations, but with a particular raw highland edge.

The initial curiosity/indifference/rejection that Elphinstone described were succeeded by what might be called the stage of limited appropriation under Abdur Rahman. Dupree summarized these developments: "[He] established what would now be called an industrial park (machine khana) one-third of a mile long and 200 yards wide; imported British and Indian engineers to help build and run the complex. " [34a] They manufactured weapons, ammunition, leather boots, uniforms, blankets, soap, candles, carpets and furniture. This little industrial park was the extent of "secondary modernization," i.e., the manufacturing facilities for some of the critical first products that a traditional culture adopts from modern culture. Most of these products were military - as Abdur Rahman himself (or Mir Munshi, who was apparently more than just a ghost writer) proudly points out in his Life. Weapons were modernized with each of the Amir's annual military campaigns. Abdur Rahman instinctively felt the truth of Sun Tze's dictum that the weaker side must be on the defense; his thinking was aimed toward the preservation of Afghanistan from the colonial powers.

It seems that among the first objects likely to be accepted by a modernizing society are weapons of war. And perhaps necessity is not the only explanation: weapons seem to have a kind of abstract, lunar quality. The extraordinarily intense reality of a weapon sets it apart. Like a precious stone, it seems to float from society to society without carrying too much of the weight of its origin. When Herman Melville visited the Marquesas in 1842, the interior tribes, innocent of all but the most glancing contact with Europeans, demonstrated a real reverance for the musket.

In Afghanistan the acquisition of Western firearms probably began at least a century before Amanullah - certainly by the time of Dost Mohammed (1830s), if any single date can be set at all. The process was undoubtedly a gradual one from the time of, say, the early Enlightenment when European gunsmithing decisively outstripped the rest of the world.

The technology acquired by Abdur Rahman was fairly advanced, but it was limited in scope and production quality was poor. In addition to "turn-key" workshops, some presided over by Europeans, it included a lithographic printing press, a distillery, and wood powered steam engines to produce electricity. "The ecology of some Afghan regions still suffers from the effects," Dupree says. While the old bazaar guilds had been "competitive and strict in their quality control, the new factories stressed quantity over quality." [35]

Abdur Rahman's policy was mixed; he set up his industrial mini-park and in his photos he almost always wore Western uniforms. Yet the European presence in Afghanistan was limited to a handful of technical experts at most. Abdur Rahman was very sensitive to the conservative and xenophobic mullahs and ulema. This tight isolationist policy meant modernization was happening, but in a very slow and controlled manner.

The limited appropriation of Western forms continued during the reign of his son Habibullah at a somewhat brisker pace. The year after Habibullah took power, Mahmud Tarzi was allowed to return and the prime interest of that extraordinary man was modernization. Habibullah seems to have indulged Tarzi in many things he frowned on in others, and the fact that the Amir rather stepped up the pace of the reforms must be due in part to the specific pressure and suggestions of Tarzi.

One of Habibullah's decisions was to build a dam on the Ghorband River for the first hydroelectric station in Afghanistan. The fate of this project sheds light on the country that Amanullah inherited. Electricity is basic; if one wanted to make a statement about modernization, this was the place to make it. But progress, at least as described by the American engineer, A.C. Jewett, who headed the project, was rocky.

With a 1500-kilowatt capacity (the size of a small Oregon county dam or enough to power a 30-story office building), the hydro station would replace the small wood-powered generators and allow the electrification of a larger part of Kabul from one central source. But Habibullah, in Jewett's judgment, despite what was really a pretty good understanding of mechanical matters, showed only a fitful interest in ordered process. [36] Jewett had to wait three weeks before Habibullah received him. The dam site was in Kohistan, at Jabal us Saraj, 40 or 50 miles north of Kabul, where the Salang road and the Panjshir valley diverge, and transportation from the railhead in Peshawar over a number of mountain passes, including the Khyber, was outrageously difficult. Roads had to be widened and special bridges built. Elephants were used to haul the generators. Yet Habibullah compromised the vital transport link by dawdling with work orders and using the new trucks to jaunt around to favorite pleasure spots. He ignored decisions, wasted money needed for the dam, and delayed visiting it.

In Western terms, Habibullah dithered and the station took 8 long years to complete. But "progress" at this rate threatens to become undetectable; wealth of the European sort is only to be created with faster action. Pace is all-important. The movement to industrialize, to study and use science, to open up traditional roles, was beginning under Habibullah; the great ship was in motion, but only barely. Amanullah was determined to increase the pace. He was an ardent man.

The British "defeat" in the Third Afghan War had made Amanullah enormously popular. [37] The victory was both a national and Muslim triumph. The ancient Christian enemy had been defeated. "He enjoyed the support of religious leaders not only in Afghanistan but also in other Islamic countries and was even mentioned as a possible successor to the deposed Turkish caliph." [38] Amanullah had already found common cause with the conservative ulema (religious scholars) during WW I when they all supported the Turks. Now his reduction of the British must have at least blunted their suspicion of his modernism, if not bringing them fully into his corner.

The time seemed auspicious for reform. Amanullah had taken power in 1919, in the midst of the breakup of the old order that followed WW I. Wilson had announced the self-determination of nations, the husk of the Ottoman Empire was being shed, and the Muslim world throbbed with new nationalisms. The enthusiasm that followed the Third Anglo-Afghan War has been called "Pan-Islamic nationalism."

Intoxicated by an ardent nationalism and by his good notices, and doubtless infected by the spirit of the times, Amanullah embarked on a program for the modernization of Afghanistan that was, considering all the difficulties he faced, nothing less than amazing.

In 1920, Kabul was largely a collection of mud and mud-brick houses and buildings on the right bank of the Kabul River. Its population was estimated at 60-70,000, depending on the caravan season. Abdur Rahman's industrial mini-park had survived; by 1920 the number of workers in the "industrial" sector had increased to 5,000. [39]

A rather unflattering picture of Kabul is painted by Jewett, the American engineer: "Its streets are narrow and crooked...in the bazaar or shopping district [they] are covered over and resemble long tunnels. The sides are lined with small booths where the merchants sell cloth, mostly cotton and cheap prints, bandanna handkerchiefs, and tinseled rubbish. Their other wares are largely of the 'made in Germany' variety, cheap things cheaply made [!]... There is little manufactured in Afghanistan...There are no sewers in Kabul. The night soil is collected by donkey boys, mixed with a little earth, and sold as fertilizers... Lines of men carry yokes across their shoulders, from which are suspended pots of milk, soft cheese, and curds in cone-shaped white cloth sacks, with the whey dripping from the pointed end." [40]

There are some indications that centuries earlier Afghanistan actually had been more advanced than in Amanullah's time. Dupree states that "before the end of the 18th century urbanization had declined perceptibly." [41] The (estimated) population of Herat fell from 100,000 in 1810 to 21,000 in 1845. This was related to a fall-off in the economy as trade routes shifted to the sea, now made safe by and for the efficient European steamers.

A good part of the country was still tribalized. Dupree estimated literacy at two (!) percent in 1900. [42] Education was in the hands of the mullahs and ulema. There was no all-weather road through the Hindu Kush mountains; hundreds of valleys were only reachable by mule trails. Abdur Rahman controlled the country fairly tightly for his time, but things slipped under Habibullah, and by 1920 the different groups, especially the Pashtun tribes, had probably regained much of their former power. [43] But Amanullah was headed in the opposite direction; more power for the center. As for the mullahs and ulema, their support should not be exaggerated.

But it seems that Amanullah largely didn't care. He had his dreams and they were more important than a handful of stubborn mullahs and some backward tribes. Modern cities would be the centers of power and he would build a new scientific city as a capital. Education, communications, business, the army - all would be new and splendid!

Given all the modern systems Amanullah wanted, in terms of customs, government and industrialization, a much tighter net would have been woven around the people than even that proto-dictator Abdur Rahman had had. We can wonder if Amanullah quite realized how much power he was actually asking for. His model was Ataturk. But Ataturk was a dictator, and a bloody one. To get what Amanullah wanted, a dynamic, semi-democratic, semi-religious corporate state, would require either great fortuitous success or the mailed fist.

The degree of central control in Afghanistan has been a point of interest for everyone, scholars in particular. The difficulty may lie in finding the proper description of a shifting mix of center-periphery control that seems to slip through the fingers like water. From talking to people who helped govern during the pre-Saur period, I would venture that by that time the center had become quite influential, the source of money and prestige, the destination of many sons of important families. Yet, at the same time, local court judgments, for instance, were often decided according to the ideas of Pashtunwali or by religious law. Traditional Islam was clearly a major influence. In 1980 it was not difficult to organize a lashkar tribal army against the communists. The past was still near. Since the amount of change that the country had gone through since 1920 seemed large, it is easy to say that the forces insisting on the power of the periphery were very considerable at the time of Amanullah.

In terms of unity, Afghanistan begins with several strikes against it. Not only do the mountains make travel and access and exchange exhausting and unrewarding, they help split up the country among 32 different language groups - although it is true that most of these are very minor. [44] There is a major sectarian division with the Shia minority, which is complicated by the clear racial differentiation of the Hazaras, who the other Afghans think to be the descendants of the hated Mongol conquerors of the 13th century. This is not to speak of the simple ethnic differences among Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, etc.

In 1920, control by Kabul was mostly a formality in the distant mountain valleys. "No government enters into the Afghan ethos; his government is his own timeless tribal code which alone he understands and respects...," claims Qabil Khan in a somewhat highly colored analysis. [45]

This was the country that Amanullah was passionate about modernizing. Cities were small, literacy minimal, Europeans almost unknown, the best roads save one just good tracks - and the embrace of the Muslim "clergy" close, even suffocating.

Amanullah the man was pictured during his heyday by a contemporary as "of medium height, handsome, well-built, of fair complexion...strong, healthy physique... He has broad social and political views and always declares in court and in public that he should be considered one of the people." [46] Professional globetrotter Lowell Thomas described him as "a jovial, vital, aggressive personality. He wore clumsy top-boots made in his own factory. A closely cropped mustache ran the length of his rather loose mouth. His dark brown eyes protruded under his heavily arched brows; they were quick, quizzical eyes with a considerable knowledge of human nature and showed enjoyment of the good things of life." [47]

Amanullah had a peculiarly personal way of promoting reform. Rhea Talley Stewart records many stories of how he went among the people to delight, astound and infuriate them with his instructions. He taught some adult literacy classes himself. "In time Amanullah devised a method whereby, he said, a person might acquire the rudiments of literacy in twenty-three days. Having heard of an English teaching method of teaching languages called Linguaphone, he called his own invention Ghaziphone, after his title of Ghazi." [48] In Kandahar he told people that "'It is a kind of flattery that people kiss other people's hands. Don't do that. You want help only from God. Be sure you know a person first and after that admire him.'" [49] Handshakes replaced hand-kissing for the royal family as well. Amanullah attended a Hindu religious service. He appeared in the bazaar and burned foreign cloth, embraced coolies, liked to surprise his officials and do the unexpected. He grabbed a shovel and did some road-building work himself to speed up the job. [50]

Amanullah would insist that he was no better than any other Afghan, that the government must be one of laws and not of man, yet when he was shocked by the dirty mud buildings in Kabul, he simply ordered the police to tear them down. [51] According to a contemporary, the amir/king was very democratic in the governing council and "once said, 'Supposing your majority voted for adoption of the bolshevik system of government, I would be the first to offer my services to work even as a bolshevik for what according to your belief might determine [sic] the welfare of Afghanistan.'" [52]

Poullada, on whom I rely for much in this essay, divides Amanullah's modernization program into three stages. The first, from 1919 to 1924, concentrated on the legal and administrative framework of government. A constitution was promulgated, the beginnings of an independent judiciary established, as well as the first ministries and a state council. The second stage, 1924 to 1928, following the Khost rebellion, was a kind of lull. We see foreign language secondary schools - French, German, English - and the Pashtun Academy. Details were being taken care of; Western-style numbers were now used in accounting. The last stage followed his return from the European tour in July, 1928. This was the time of the most famous measures - requiring men to wear Western clothes to court and the like. But the last period only lasted about 6 months; it ended with the revolt that overthrew him. [53]

From the beginning, Amanullah's reforms proposed to do no less than change the entire form and spirit of governing in Afghanistan. Traditional forms of patronage, personal payments, local or tribal rule (all strongly affected by the local nature of much real power): virtually the whole social reality of life was being called into question by Amanullah's program.

Amanullah's ambition had carried him far indeed. He and the men around him, as well as the women like his mother Ulya Hazrat and his independent-minded wife Soraya, eventually challenged something in every category, from the interpretation of the Quran to the kind of clothes people wore. Amanullah and Tarzi and the others were playing politics of the largest sort. At times they must have been operating in a kind of fever, since the wager was so great and the odds were so long.

Of all the reforms, the most sensitive touched on the religious-cultural bases of society. To justify the reform effort, Amanullah (following Tarzi) insisted in effect on a particular interpretation of certain Quranic passages or ideas. [54] On a practical plane, mullahs would be taught in government-regulated

schools; their income from the production and rent of religious lands (the religious endowments, waqf) was partially nationalized. The effort to Westernize the law courts threatened the status of the Islamic aristocracy, the ulema, who staffed the Islamic courts and held other influential positions.

But one thing seems to have been more sensitive than religion: women's rights. Although Habibullah's harem (or part of it) had been photographed without veils, they had not appeared so in public and the Government made no issue of it. So it was a revolutionary moment when women's rights in the Western sense were first proclaimed by Amanullah. He announced freedom of choice in marriage; the wearing of veils was discouraged. Even though most of these reforms were only suggested, the direction of change was unmistakable. And the conservatives did not carefully distinguish a voluntary but (to them) outrageous rule from a mandatory one.

Along with the important governmental restructuring (many important administrative changes were made up in a code rather magically called the Nizamnama), civil rights were granted to all Afghans, the tax system reorganized, and cash substituted for in-kind payments. We see the first Government budget. Internal customs were abolished. A road building program, which continued throughout his rule, was begun, and a telephone and telegraph system was initiated.

Slavery was finally abolished. Most of the slaves were female domestic servants and Hazaras, who had been brutally suppressed by Abdur Rahman. Following the announcement there was a wave of marriages, as men who didn't have the money for the normally high bride price married the former slaves, who came gratis. [55]

Corvee (begir) was done away with - i.e., forced labor on roads, etc., in lieu of taxes. The old system of baqiyat (whereby the state held a bureaucrat's heirs responsible for his debts) was abolished. In the tradition of Washington, D.C. and Canberra, Amanullah planned to have a new capital - and, according to Poullada, not one, but two, at Dar-ul-aman and Paghman.

Some of his many other proposals included special codes which were secular in nature, some commercial law, an anti-corruption campaign, secular curricula in some schools, adult literacy classes, two girls' schools in Kabul, modern hospitals, livestock and cadastral surveys, education abroad for boys from leading families, expansion of the press, regulation of expenses for weddings and other ceremonies, etc., etc., etc. He also allowed the French to begin archeological work and founded a museum. Tribal subsidies were to be abolished.

These changes touched all the forms of power. Of course, saying that such-and-such a measure was "instituted" or "founded" or "abolished" often suggests too much reality. These were intentions. Even so, the existing establishment was being asked to change in order to keep its power, i.e., to perform different functions, to become "experts" in the European sense. Men who could not change or who were committed to the old system would lose much of what they had (especially in terms of abstract pride and status) if Amanullah succeeded.

The Pashtun tribes, the major element in the traditional power structure, were directly affected. For Amanullah, tribes were frankly obsolete. He was thinking in the simple nationalist terms of modernity: every citizen is a positive, contributing member of the larger political reality, the state-people. It is not surprising that he was attracted to communism, and later to fascism. Traditional groups like the tribes could not hope to survive the full rigor of Amanullah's restructuring if it was ever put into effect.

The reality, of course, was that the reforms were not fully carried out - in part precisely because the tribes would not go along. In retrospect it seems inevitable. Central power in Afghanistan has always been a highly qualified concept. The tribes resented Amanullah's initiatives from Kabul as interference; radical change was anathema, "particularly public education for girls and greater initiatives for women." [56]

The Khost rebellion of 1924-25 simply showed how much the spirit of resistance had grown at a point when Amanullah was still popular from the Third Anglo-Afghan War and his reforms had not yet become notorious. For nine months the Mangal tribe around the town of Khost in Paktia resisted federal power. Since the Mangals didn't have enough support from the other Pashtun tribes, they failed. But it was ominous that Amanullah had to rely on other tribes to put down the Mangal, and that his own army could not cope. [57]

Although the rebellion failed, Amanullah pulled in his horns. During the "middle" stage of reform, there were apparently fewer innovations and more emphasis on working out measures already proposed. Two examples were hospital development (a maternity hospital was added) and educational reform (now including schools for clerks and accountants, teachers, police, agronomists - even mullahs!). Poullada singles out some measures as characteristic, however, of the period between the Khost uprising and Amanullah's trip to Europe: reforestation begun, proposed compulsory primary education, women encouraged to form associations, a few itinerant teachers for nomads, draft system changed and the introduction of the metric system.

Amanullah's famous European journey needs no explanation. His whole ambition had been to raise the Afghan people; now he was going to those places that had already been raised. Between December 1927 and July 1928, he and Soraya and various officials visited India, Egypt, Italy, England, France, Germany, Poland, the USSR, Turkey and Persia. He was welcomed enthusiastically in India and Egypt as a champion of Islam and the East; in Europe he became a minor sensation. Newspapers splashed stories of this exotic reformer across their front pages; crowds lined the streets; Amanullah was received by heads of state. "When Amanullah went shopping in Berlin, he used to peep from behind a blind to see if the crowds in the street had diminished or increased. Most of the time they had increased, for this gesture had become generally known and anticipated, and while Amanullah was peeping at the Berlin public, the public was peeping at him. They loved him for this." [58]

Turkey and Persia were probably the most relevant reform-wise: independent Muslim countries that had seriously undertaken to modernize. Turkey was critical. Amanullah was fascinated by Kemal Ataturk, for whom Ghaus says he had "immense admiration." [59] He wanted Kemal as his political godfather. The quicksilver Amanullah, so eager, so quick, so imaginative, fits a labile type that must have loved (and greatly needed) the granite self-assurance of Ataturk, the decisiveness, the real sense of practice. With Amanullah's self-dramatizing personality, Ataturk provided the hero in the theater of his mind. Ataturk had begun as a military man and the desire for military answers never left him. No matter that his methods were, to say the least, abrupt and harsh, the Afghan King probably was impressed by the results. He was charged up by his trip and ready to roll up his sleeves and really make some changes.

But when Amanullah crossed the border, driving his own Rolls Royce, Afghanistan was not primed for reform, whether brash or subtle. Quite the opposite. People had seen newspaper photos from Europe showing Queen Soraya with bare head, face

and arms - as shocking to old fashioned Afghan Muslims as if we discovered that the President's wife was a heroin addict. There was a wide-spread belief that the trip had cost a huge amount of money. And why was the King truckling to foreigners?

The situation was balanced on a knife's edge, but Amanullah seemed unaware of it. Instead, "impressed by what he had seen in Europe, and especially Turkey, he accelerated his efforts to narrow the gap between Afghanistan and the more advanced countries he had visited." [60] In a monumental four-day speech he harangued the delegates to a Loya Jirga (grand assembly) about the need for progress. He insisted more strongly than ever on modernizing government and society - a parliamentary system that would represent individuals not tribes, rights for women, building railways. Tribal chiefs had to wear full morning dress to his speeches. Western dress was required in certain parts of Kabul. Of course, all this smacked strongly of Ataturk.

A list of some of the reforms suggested during this period: campaigns against polygamy, the veil, purdah (but none are prohibited); films and plays and the construction of an opera house; a pure water supply for Kabul; general encouragement of women's rights; a minimum age for marriage; midwife training and mobile hospitals; secular curricula and adult education development; vocational schools and compulsory primary education (again); coeducation for students 6 - 11 and a medical school. The Red Crescent was organized.

To take one of these innovations: Rhea Talley Stewart says, "The first cinema was an education in the ways of the Western world, for the films all came from America or Europe; since they were silent films, all the knowledge of plot or social background came from the pantomime. During the first months, as each film came to an end, a man would arise and discourse on the depravity of Western civilization as the audience had seen it. Soon everyone had heard the warning, for the cinema theater was crowded from the very beginning, and it ceased." [61] It was suggested that a ban be placed on films featuring anti-Asian themes, Biblical stories or Western morality and love stories! Little was apparently done.

Not surprisingly, the social and religious reforms were the most controversial, particularly those "referring to dress, women's rights, and familial customs such as marriages and funerals." [62] In one order, men in Kabul were told to wear European style clothes, including hats. A seemingly harmless object like a European hat was important to a Muslim. He might believe it came between him and heaven. Anyway, he couldn't wear anything with a brim for prayers, during which he had, hat on, to touch his forehead to the ground several times. The religious establishmentarians were angry and alienated: "When reforms come in, Islam goes out," they grumbled. [63]

While the political and economic reforms did not attract the same criticism, this was all a matter of degree. Extending the army draft to tribal areas, eliminating subsidies to chiefs and traditional titles, all was a threat to tribes, as, indirectly, were the plans to build railroads and extend the telegraph system.

Though the economic reforms were fragmentary and never fully implemented, Poullada feels that Amanullah and Tarzi "succeeded in their primary mission: they increased national income, expanded commerce and trade and created the base for sound developments in public works." Poullada claims that the development plan "was integrated, grandiose, and bold. To a certain extent it required movement along all fronts simultaneously, and all within a very short time span." [64]

As far as the success of the economic program goes, Poullada is apparently in the minority; the consensus seems to be that it was ill-conceived. To the caustic Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan "became a mausoleum of derelict machinery and abandoned factories." [64a]

Some of the reforms clearly were failures, like the abortive introduction of the metric system. Others were only proposed; they were planning exercises. Or their scope as implemented was severely limited, as in the transition to Western dress. [65] Essentially this injunction (according to Poullada, never made it out of Kabul and had only limited application there. The nature of these reforms often has been misunderstood. Amanullah's pronouncements on unveiling and emerging from purdah were not meant as requirements, but as freedoms. Women could choose to take advantage of them if they wanted. There would be no Government sanctions if they did unveil or emerge from purdah; in fact, there would be Government protection. The prohibition of karakul hats was meant to divert more of the wool into the export market. These subtleties of interpretation were lost in the flood of anti-Amanullah propaganda by his enemies.

Paper plans, misunderstandings, resistance - or at best grudging acquiescence, the plans seemed to evaporate into mountain air as Amanullah skipped from one pet project to another. "To put such a grand design into operation under even the most favorable circumstances would have required the combined talents of a gifted innovator, a brilliant administrator, and a master politician. Amanullah was amply endowed with the first requirement but deficient in the other two." [66] The King was undoubtedly mercurial, even eccentric. According to his Turkish adviser, he would sneak up on people in the palace with a large pair of shears (in other reports, a small pair of scissors or sharp pocket knife) and cut up their clothes if they were made from foreign cloth. [67]

Amanullah had returned from his tour in July; by November, disturbances had broken out around the country. Amanullah had built his own gallows: each reform had used up political capital and alienated more people. The tribes, the powerful local chiefs and leaders, the mullahs and the ulema were all alienated. His imprudence had even cost Amanullah some of his friends.

The young Amanullah had been an eager student of Mahmud Tarzi. That relationship had to change after Amanullah became King. No man who believed that the state was embodied in his person, as Amanullah obviously did, was likely to depend on someone else. Tarzi apparently counseled a slower pace on modernization but was ignored. He was replaced as foreign minister. On the grand tour, Tarzi left the royal party before it reached London. Back in Afghanistan, the older man's advice was called senile by Amanullah. [68]

The final rebellion broke out when some Sanghu Khel and Alikher Khel of the Shinwari attacked government posts near the Khyber Pass, perhaps instigated by outside religious/political forces, perhaps in a genuine dispute over who was to collect "tolls" from merchants. When Amanullah looked around for support, there was only a void. He had failed to pay sufficient attention to the army, which probably didn't like him anyway, and now it deserted him. The rebels had been supported by the Islamic establishment from the beginning. [69] The tribal chiefs allied themselves to ulema, who didn't like the gospel of modernization and didn't want to be changed into instruments of what they didn't like. If the rebels wanted legalistic grounds, they could point to the suspicions that remained about the death of Habibullah.

The rebels captured Jalalabad and cut the main supply road to Peshawar. Tajik rebels threatened the capital from the north. Amanullah was forced to cancel most of his reforms and agree to a council of elders. But the Tajiks pressed on and some of Amanullah's troops deserted. He abdicated on January 14, 1929, and fled to Kandahar. There he changed his mind and rescinded his abdication, but he was unable to rally the Durrani tribes. He gave up and left Afghanistan, forever as it turned out, in April, 1929.

Afghans still accuse the British of causing Amanullah's downfall. N.M. Khairi-Taraki claims that the British "prepared" the fall of Amanullah.[70] He supports the charge with contemporary dispatches from German legations in Tehran and London. However, those dispatches seem quite fanciful. Abdur Rahman Pazhwak saw the cause of the civil war over Amanullah as the "political maneuverings of outside elements." [71]

To my knowledge, no careful historian supports this interpretation and it seems to me that Poullada has laid it to rest with his research in the British archives. There is no hint in the archives (or in any memoir) of any such serious machinations. [72] Abdul Samad Ghaus carefully skirts the issue, saying "Afghans in general remain convinced that the elimination of Amanullah was engineered by the British because, in their view, he had become too friendly with the Russians and an obstacle to the furtherance of British interests." But then in a separate passage he admits that "Amanullah was overthrown by the forces of ignorance and reaction that he had fought to vanquish throughout his reign." [73]

Those who saw a British shadow on events pointed to the mysterious presence of Lawrence of Arabia (T.E. Lawrence) in the neighborhood. Lawrence, who was indeed posted for a short time as an RAF clerk near Miram Shah in the NWFP, was supposed to be operating inside Afghanistan as a secret agent. In fact, this solitary, eccentric man was using the isolation of the post - none of the British airmen were allowed outside the barbed wire perimeter - to translate the Odyssey.

It is true that Amanullah's relations with the British seemed to have been uniformly bad. The British Ambassador Humphrys despised him and another member of the Mission, W.K. Fraser-Tytler, after praising Amanullah's devotion to his country, concluded with this scathing assessment: "A key to his character may perhaps be found in his curious stammering, staccato manner of speech and in his lack of chin, indicating an abrupt, impulsive, and at the same time a weak character. Weak that is to say in his ability to choose good advisers; impulsive in that he was governed not by any reason or understanding of the requirements of his country, but by sudden decisions based on imperfect knowledge, which caused him to embark on projects often quite unsuitable or beyond the power of his servants to carry through. To those fatal weaknesses must be added an absurd conceit and arrogance of disposition..." [74]

If the British did influence the outcome, it was by remaining neutral. They declined to support any of the parties, seeming simply to require that anyone who wanted to participate in the contest for power in Afghanistan not do it from India. However, it is plausible that the British were more than ready to support Nadir Khan, who may have shown himself open to British suggestions during his exile in India. [75]

Amanullah failed in Afghanistan while Ataturk more or less succeeded in Turkey partly because of physical factors. Turkey bordered on Europe; part of the country (much more in the times before WW I) is in Europe. As for Afghanistan,

by the time of Abdur Rahman, it was further from Europe than Japan. What begins as physical isolation due to the Hindu Kush and various deserts becomes an ideological factor - the conservatism of mountaineers. Turkey was more of a center of activity; it was located on the sea. There had been reform efforts based on European models in Turkey since at least 1700. "Amanullah chose to follow in the footsteps of Kemal but forgot that the Turks had been for centuries in contact with the cultured world of Europe." [76] In the final analysis, Amanullah was not Ataturk and Afghanistan was not Turkey.

Amanullah retired to fascist Italy. With his fall the first period of radical reform in Afghanistan ended in failure. He had broken Abdur Rahman's rule: "[Do] not try to introduce new reforms of any kind in such a hurry as to set the people against their ruler." [77] The irony is that, at least according to our most superficial observer, Lowell Thomas, Amanullah _was_ aware of the dangers of going too far too fast. He quotes the King as saying, "To bring learning to my people must be a slow process. We hope to lay our plans well and truly, but not too fast." [78]

Between Amanullah and his successor, Nadir, there was a strange interlude when the country was ruled by a strapping freebooter who led the insurgent Tajiks and enjoyed a reputation as a local Robin Hood. He was best known (at least to the Pashtuns) as _Bacha Saqqao_, or Son of the Water Carrier, an indication of his simple origins. Although Bacha Saqqao, or Habibullah II, was at first supported by the exotically named and very influential Hazrat of Shor Bazar, a _pir_ or hereditary Sufi saint of the Mujaddidi family, he was able to establish neither an effective administration nor his own legitimacy. Within 8 months he was overpowered by the traditional Pashtun aristocracy. But the episode was important because it was the first modern challenge by the Tajiks to Pashtun rule. The Tajiks told stories about their great warrior "Habibullah Ghazi"; to the Pashtuns he remained a dumb bandit. [79] Whetever the truth, he was soon gone.

While the new King, Nadir, who came from another branch of the same general royal clan as Amanullah, was what might be called a systematizing conservative, not totally reactionary, most of the reforms were dropped. When challenged by the exiled Amanullah, Nadir condemned him in detail. "We are not going to offend the mullahs by undertaking universal education until such time as the nation seems ready for it," he is supposed to have said, and this comment probably sums up his whole approach. [80]

When Nadir was assassinated in 1933, his policies were perpetuated by the regents of his teen-age son, Zahir Shah. To the reform minded, time seemed to slow to a crawl and by the mid-50s "only those men whose memories reached back more than a quarter of a century had ever seen an unveiled Afghan woman on the streets of Kabul." [81]

The personal friendship with King Victor Emmanuel of Italy formed on the 1928 visit helped Amanullah gain asylum there. He was able to maintain a certain social position, but had to sell the family's jewelry to survive. He spent some of his abundant spare time making furniture.

At first, he did not give up politics but his intrigues came to nothing. The Nazis showed some interest in placing him in power again but not enough for anything to come of it. By the end of WW II, he must have seen the futility of these efforts for he wrote to Zahir Shah, pledging his loyalty. He was rewarded with a stipend by the Kabul Government, but not allowed to return. In Rome

his nephew awoke one night to find him by his bed muttering, "Why? Why? Why?" [82] Amanullah died in Switzerland in the spring of 1960. His body was returned to Afghanistan and buried next to his father in Jalalabad.

In the last century Afghanistan has lived through one of the most difficult and long drawn out cases of modernization. The tribal system, the education setup, the hold of the mullahs, the subordination of women, the land tenure system: these elements were recognized first by Amanullah and then by the Marxists of Saur as the roots of the old system. But even the more systematic approach by the Marxists toward changing them did them little good. The roots were too deep; or perhaps the reformers had too little imagination.

In Afghanistan a self-consciously tough people live like mountaineers, suspicious of the outside and suspicious of change. Islam (more than a common point of reference) acts like a sealant of tradition. Thus Amanullah's failures continue into this winter of 1992-93, as in the cold and chipped halls of the ministries of Kabul the dispute goes on as the Afghans still try to deal with science.

NOTES

[1] *Die Zeit*, March 11, 1988, p. 13.

[2] Majrooh, 11.

[3] The importance of the battle over modernization is also a theme of Eqbal Ahmad and Richard J. Barnett, "Bloody Games," *The New Yorker*, April 11, 1988.

[4] Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora, India, 1953, vol. 2, p. 34.

[5] In Harrison Salisbury, *Russia*, Atheneum, 1965, 8-9.

[6] Poullada, 36-7

[7] Poullada, 38.

[8] Ghaus, 30.

[9] Poullada, 41.

[10[Gregorian, 167.

[11] See Kang letter #351 in Jane Larson's "New Source Materials on Kang Youwei," forthcoming in *Journal of the Chinese Historical Society of America*, 1993.

[12] Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Modern China and a New World: Kang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927*, 533 ff.

[13] Poullada, 39.

[14] Poullada, 41.

[15] Poullada, 42, from Gregorian, 360.

[16] Kedourie, 80.

[17] Russell, 3, 17-18.

[18] Lloyd and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, quoted in Black and Dupree, 18.

[19] Analects, VII, 20.

[20] Analects, III, 1.

[21 Poullada, 11.

[22] Thomas, 210, 214.

[23] Ghaus, 31.

[24] Ghaus, 32.

[25] Kedourie, 78.

[26] Akbar S. Ahmed, "Islam: The Roots of Misperception," *History Today*, April, 1991, 30.

[27] Ghaus, 35-6.

[28] Elphinstone, I, 56.

[29] Spain, 23.

[30] Ghaus, 30.

[31] Elphinstone, I, 325-6.

[32] Elphinstone I, 370.

[33] Elphinstone, I, 260.

[34] Black, Dupree, 66-7.

[34a] Black, Dupree, 102.

[35] Black, Dupree, 102 (from Gregorian)

[36] Jewett, 19.

[37] Gregorian, 231; Poullada, 47.

[38] Poullada, 47.

[39] Black, Dupree, 102 (from Gregorian)

[40] Jewett, 15-17.

[41] Black, Dupree, 112.

[42] Black, Dupree, 146.

[43] Poullada, 68.

[44] See Dupree, 66 ff.

[45] Qabil Khan, 31.

[46] Poullada, 50 - from Abdul Ghani, *A Review of the Political Situation in Central Asia*.

[47] Thomas, 210-1.

[48] Stewart, 129.

[49] Stewart, 124.

[50] Stewart, 203-4, 195, 206.

[51] Poullada, 51.

[52] Poullada, 50 - from Abdul Ghani.

[53] Poullada 70 ff.

[54] Gregorian, 167.

[55] Stewart, 126-7.

[56] Ghaus, 44-5.

[57] Gregorian, 257.

[58] Stewart, 344.

[59] Ghaus, 45.

[60] Poullada, 45.

[61] Stewart, 297.

[62] Poullada, 144.

[63] Dilip Hiro, Holy Wars: The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism, 234.

[64] Poullada, 149, 144.

[65] Poullada, 80.

[66] Poullada, 144.

[67] Poullada, 51.

[68] Stewart, 399, 435.

[69] Poullada, 161.

[70] N.M. Khairi-Taraki, "Afghanistan - seine Bevoelkerung..." in Hans Werner Mohm, ed., Afghanistan 1987, Dritte Welt-Laden, Losheim, Germany, 1987, 66-7.

[71] Gregorian, 292; also Ludwig W. Adamec, Afghanistan's Foreign Relations to the Mid-Twentieth Century, 152 ff.

[72] Poullada, 198 ff, 259 ff.

[73] Ghaus, 47, 46.

[74] Fraser-Tytler. 200-1.

[75] Stewart, 305.

[76] Mustafa Chokaiev in Gregorian, 274.

[77] Life, II, 190.

[78] Thomas, 212.

[79] Mir Tamim Ansary, Afghanistan: Fighting for Freedom, 56.

[80] Ben James, The Secret Kingdom in Stewart, 575.

[81] Spain, 72.

[82] Stewart, 579 ff.

[83] Poullada, 52.

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